

**Alnwick Urban District.**

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**ANNUAL REPORT**

OF THE

**Medical Officer of Health.**

**1908.**



# URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

## Medical Officer's Annual Report, 1908.

GENTLEMEN,

I have again sub-divided the town into two portions, the inhabitants of which I have taken as about equally numerous. In the more densely peopled area which is circumscribed by Hotspur Street, Green Bat, Pottergate, and back along Bondgate to the Tower, the residents cannot be said to exist under such favourable conditions as those living outside this area, and it is well to remember the fact when considering the figures which follow.

### VITAL STATISTICS.

This year 184 births have been notified, which gives a rate of 27 per thousand of estimated population.

This is well above the average for the last ten years. The balance of the sexes has been well preserved, viz., 91 males and 93 females.

The death-rate is higher than it has been for several years, being 19.7 per thousand.

				Town.	Country.	Total.	Town.	Country.	Total
				Rate per 1000.					
Estimated Population	...	...	...	6300	500	6800			
Births	...	...	...	175	9	184	27.7	18	27
Deaths from all Causes	...	...	...	128	6	134	20.3	12	19.7
„ „ Zymotic Disease	...	...	...	6	1	7	.95	2	1.02
„ „ Phthisis	...	...	...	15	0	15	2.2	0	2.2
„ Under 1 Year	...	...	...	20	1	21	3.17	2	3.08
				Old portion.		New portion.	Country.		Total.
Births	...	...	...	105.		70.	9.		184.
Deaths	...	...	...	66.		62.	6.		134.
„ Under 1 Year	...	...	...	17.		3.	1.		21.
				Births of Males 91.		Births of Females 93			
				Infectious Notification 19.		(Rate per 1000 2.79.)			

The deaths of males number 64 against 70 of females.

The increase in deaths cannot be directly traced to any particular cause. A moderately severe epidemic of whooping cough broke out in the late summer and autumn, mostly among young children, and claimed 4 victims, while Influenza was accountable for 4 more. The deaths from Phthisis were 15, a number considerably in excess of that of the previous year. While reserving my opinion on the ultimate benefits that accrue to consumptive patients at sanatoria and kindred Institutions, I would direct the attention of the Council to the fact that such are becoming more generally recognised, and, in view of this, the question of the early notification and treatment of Phthisis is of importance, as it is mainly in its first stages that any improvement is really to be looked for.

Up to the middle of May the town enjoyed immunity from infectious disease. From that time 19 cases were reported, of which 13 (two of them fatal) were of Diphtheria. These were sporadic and for the most part occurred in different families and in different parts of the town. Only in one instance were there more attacked than one in any single family, and here, had the doctor been at once called in, the other two children would, in all probability, have escaped.

During the year children with this particular affection would seem to have passed unrecognised, and these have from time to time infected in a more pronounced form those with whom they have come in contact. On the other hand, one might attribute the outbreak to climatic conditions, but, had this been so, it is more likely that the trouble would have been epidemic rather than sporadic. In this connection I must add my tribute to the value of the bacteriological examination, carried out at the expense of the County Council, as an aid to the true diagnosis of this dangerous malady. Five of the nineteen cases were of Scarlet Fever. An outbreak of this nature has not taken place for the last 10 years, and we must admit that, considering the lapse of time, there is plenty of material to work upon. With one ward of the Infectious Hospital almost continuously occupied by Diphtheria patients, it is well nigh impossible to prevent an epidemic of Scarlet Fever. Conditions at present bear this out, as up to the time of writing we have one portion of the Fever Hospital unavailable for the reason above stated, while several cases of Scarlet Fever have been reported. Fortunately it has been possible to isolate these latter at their own homes.

In connection with the Fever Hospital certain improvements are desirable, such as better heating and a better system of lighting and ventilation.

Although we have not had many cases of Summer Diarrhœa, yet in the Autumn there was an inordinate number of cases of Diarrhœa and Sickness, a state of matters to which I specially called attention in my monthly report in November. I consider the remarks I then made worthy of repetition. They are as follows :—

“Cases of Diarrhœa have been numerous. This may be due either to the swarms of flies, and warm weather, and the consequent contamination of food, or to the state of the water supply.

Certainly the weather of October has been the worst we have experienced during the year so far as the keeping of food stuffs is concerned. The Diarrhœa was confined, not to infants of the lower classes, as is usually the case in ordinary Summer Diarrhœa, but affected persons of all ages irrespective of class distinction. For this reason I am inclined to blame the water supply.”

With this latter question I shall deal at a later stage in my report.

Reference to Table 4 will give an analysis of the causes of deaths and the ages at which they occurred. It is noteworthy that in September only two deaths were registered, being the least number recorded for 18 years.

Eight cases of Infectious Disease (two of them fatal) were sent to the Hospital. I have, as in previous years, had the drains in most instances tested, and in several of them defects have been found and remedied.

### WATER SUPPLY.

In the first annual report which it was my privilege to present to you, I pointed out the necessity for an efficient and wholesome water supply. This I have continued to bring under your notice from year to year, and I have now reason to hope that my repeated warnings are likely to bear fruit, inasmuch as the Council have engaged the services of Mr. Fowler of Manchester to report and advise on the whole question of supply and storage. I am anxiously awaiting the report as the result of his recent visit to our district.

The actual supply during the year has again been deficient, and pumping from the usual sources has been necessary.

The total amount pumped was 6,000,000 gallons at Culvert Springs Dam and at Horsley's at Craster Place.

This shortage has been in a measure due to the small rainfall this year, a depth of 24 inches only having been recorded. This is 6 inches below the last ten years' average. As part of our supply is obtained from shallow springs, it can readily be understood how a dry summer affects supply and demand. A distinct saving of water for domestic purposes has resulted from the use of the Clayport tank for street watering. Had the tank not been available, this necessary adjunct to public health could not have been so effectively performed.

The water has been cut off on a few nights in various sections of the town for the purpose of locating possible sources of waste.

My monthly report of November 3rd, already referred to, led to the analysis of the water, and the result justified the statements contained therein. The consequence was that the water from the Mossy Ford was excluded from the Town Supply. We cannot forget also that at times the quantity of suspended matter rendered the water quite unfit for domestic use.

#### DAIRIES AND MILK SUPPLY.

I should be glad if the Council would again approach the Local Government Board on the subject of modifying the existing bye-laws for the regulation of the above. These were under consideration in 1903, but were not sanctioned. Although I have little fault to find in general, there are certain particulars which could be remedied.

I should not like to see any bye-laws made too stringent, as conditions vary considerably between the country and the town, and as there is and has been for years past a shortage in the supply of milk in the district.

On the other hand, it is necessary to protect the consumer from possible sources of disease by ensuring him a sufficient quantity of pure milk. This can only be realised by close attention to everything connected therewith, from the care and condition of the cow onwards.

#### CATTLE MARKET.

In the early part of the year the new market was opened. The benefits, from a health point of view, that follow from its removal from the centre of the town must be many. Some difficulty has been experienced during the dry weather in properly cleansing the market, and water has had to be led from the Clayport hydrants already referred to.

## MEDICAL INSPECTION OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

A commencement in connection with the carrying out of the above has been made by the officer appointed by the County Council, and it is too early yet to form an estimate of any advantage that may accrue.

## TOWN IMPROVEMENT SCHEME.

The loan sanctioned for the erection of the remainder of the houses on the land belonging to the Council has just been granted. The prospective demolition of the houses in Area No. 2 will further accentuate the need for suitable workmen's dwellings, a condition which is referred to in another part of this report.

## GENERAL IMPROVEMENTS.

The houses erected and occupied during 1908 total 11, while there are 4 in the course of erection in Stott Street. The old flag pavements in Clayport, Upper and Lower Howick Street, have been replaced by cement, and ratho channelling substituted for that hitherto in use.

The unpaved part of St. Michael's Lane has been relaid with macadam, and channelling as above has been put down.

## REQUIREMENTS.

Now that the water question is receiving active attention, the point which appears to come next in importance is the better housing of the *bona fide* working class. True, the erection of houses of a particular class goes on, but, to put it plainly, there is in the town scarcely a type of house which in either rental or accommodation meets the requirements of the case. For my own part I am fully convinced that rows of houses, similar in construction to those met with in pit villages, providing the sanitary arrangements are suitable, are the most desirable type of house. They would be quickly occupied, and, if a sufficient number were erected, it would enable me to deal more effectively with the subject of overcrowding. The benefits of fresh air and sunlight would also be extended to many to whom they are at present practically denied, and, as these are recognised as potent factors in the treatment of disease, the health of the community is bound to suffer unless they can be obtained. The moral tone would be raised to a higher level.

Mr. Milburn's report will give you an account of the smaller sanitary improvements that have been effected during the year. It is the duty of a medical officer to continually keep before his Council the various sanitary requirements of the district. While this may at times cause differences of opinion, I am free to acknowledge the consideration which these have always had at the hands of the members of the Alnwick Council.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

R. B. ROBSON, M.B., M.R.C.S.





## **Report of the Inspector of Nuisances.**

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Council Offices,

Green Bat,

Alnwick,

February 4th, 1909.

TO THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

SIR,

I beg again to submit a brief record of such work as has been carried out in connection with the Sanitary Department during another year.

### **TENEMENTED PROPERTIES.**

The outward or visible cleansing of properties of the tenemented class, which I have been able to refer to as improving in past reports, I am glad to say still continues. There are occasional lapses, due very often, I am sorry to say, to differences amongst those occupying this class of property, as to who shall do the needful cleansing of conveniences provided for their use. The service of a preliminary notice is, however, generally effective in inducing them to combine to clear away the evidence of their domestic neglect.

The admission of fresh air to their dwellings is also a matter which is receiving attention by the more enlightened of these people as a means whereby to sweeten their daily life. Unfortunately the position of the dwelling in large numbers of these properties hinders the free circulation of this invigorating element, and owing to these same conditions the more important factor of sunshine never has an opportunity to penetrate the dark corners of many of these homes. Let us hope that your repeated exhortations for better housing provision for the workers, together with the Council's efforts to meet the need to some extent, will before very long bear fruit and bring about the eradication of the worst of these places.

### **SANITARY STRUCTURAL IMPROVEMENTS.**

In past reports I have brought under your notice the improvements which were being effected with regard to the better drainage of premises. During this last year similar work has been going on;

drains which have been proved defective by test applied to them, have been overhauled. In most cases the improvement has meant, not only a renewal of drains, but a complete overhaul of sanitary arrangements. Defective W.C.'s have in a large number of both tenemented and better class houses been fitted with modern forms of pedestal basins, and syphonic flushing cisterns. Additional closet accommodation has also been provided in a number of cases. Gullies of defective form have given place to self-cleansing forms where found needful. Ventilation of the drains has also been beneficially carried out on most of the premises where drain improvements have been executed.

### FLUSHING OF SEWERS.

The sewers which can be flushed from storage tank on Clayport Green have been regularly flushed, more especially during the summer months. Sewers which cannot be served by this excellent supply of flush water were deprived of cleansing by flushing owing to shortage of water during the part of year when a clearance of solids from them is of greatest importance.

### COMMON LODGING HOUSES.

The Common Lodging Houses have been regularly inspected, and, with odd exceptions, I have found them in good order. An undesirable class of people are, however, being attracted to the town at the present time, owing to the low price charged for accommodation.

### SLAUGHTER HOUSES.

The improvements carried out here some time ago have proved to be very beneficial to the cleansing of the various houses, and I believe are fully appreciated by the several occupiers. Neglect to clear away offal in accordance with the regulations on the part of those engaged by butchers to assist in carrying on their business, does occasionally happen to come under my notice.

### DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.

These places have been conducted, as in past years, under fairly orderly conditions. One new cowshed has been brought into use for stallage of 13 cows. This, unlike many of the older established ones, is constructed to comply with the requirements of present day ideas.

JOSEPH MILBURN,

Assoc. Royal San. Inst.,

Inspector of Nuisances,